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In this paper, the author examines the infiniteness of God's mercy and His aim in creating man as seen in His qualities and actions, in divine sayings, and in the supplications and hadiths of the Ahlul Bayt (a).
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Understanding God's Mercy Part 3

Mohammad Ali Shomali¹

Abstract

Part II of this series offered a description of the implications of Allah's attributes, such as al-Rahman and al-Rahim, as well as His coexisting attributes of mercy and power with a connection to Allah's objective in His creation.

In this part, attributes such as His generosity, forgiveness, and kindness are described with further descriptions of His mercy connected to His knowledge and richness. Divine mercy is All-embracing as Allah has made mercy incumbent upon Himself; this mercy cannot be prevented by any source and can save people from divine punishment. Allah greatly emphasizes on His mercy for no other reason than to qualify ourselves to receive more of it and eventually become His vicegerents.

Introduction

In part II of this series, we saw that among divine qualities and attributes revealed in the Qur'an, His mercy is by far the most frequently mentioned and the most emphasised one. We have already studied those which are derived from the root rahmah, such as al-Rahman, al-Rahim, Arham al-Rahimin, Khayr al-Rahimin, Dhu al-Rahmah, and Dhu Rahmat-in Wasi'ah. Allah's characteristics of being Noble,

Bountiful, All-affectionate, All-forgiving, the Possessor of all majesty, and others are offered in this part. Moreover, descriptions of His mercy as linked to his knowledge and richness has also been described. Keeping in mind the abovementioned attributes, Allah instructs people to be merciful with one another.

Additional Qualities of Allah's Mercy

al-Wadud

One of the names of Allah in the Qur'an is Wadiid. It comes from the root wudd which means affection; thus, Wadiid means all-Affectionate. This is mentioned twice in the Qur'an.

وَهُوَ الْغَفُورُ الْوَدُودُ

“And He is the All-forgiving, All-affectionate” (85: 14)

وَاسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ ثُمَّ تُوبُوا إِلَيْهِ ۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي رَحِيمٌ وَدُودٌ

“Plead with your Lord for forgiveness, then turn to Him penitently; My Lord is indeed All-merciful, All-affectionate.” (11:90)

al-Akram

The other name is al-Akram. This is mentioned in the Qur'an once:

اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ

“Read and your Lord is the Most Generous.” (96:3)

This is one of the very verses that were revealed at the beginning of Islam.

Khayr-un Thawab-an

This means that Allah is the best in rewarding. So if you work for Him, He will be the best person to reward you. This is used once in the Qur'an in the verse.

هُنَالِكَ الْوَلَايَةُ لِلَّهِ الْحَقِّ ۚ هُوَ خَيْرٌ ثَوَابًا وَخَيْرٌ عُقْبًا

“There, all guardianship belongs to Allah, the Real. He is best in rewarding, and the best giver of

success.” (18:44)

Ghaffar

This means that Allah is All-forgiving. This has been used for Allah five times in the Qur'an, such as in 71:10.

فَقُلْتُ اسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ غَفَّارًا

“...Plead to your Lord for forgiveness. Indeed He is All-forgiving.” (71: 10)

Ahl al-Maghfirah

This means that Allah is someone whose nature is forgiving to those who are worthy to forgive. This is mentioned once in the Qur'an in chapter 74, verse 56:

وَمَا يَذْكُرُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ ۚ هُوَ أَهْلُ التَّقْوَىٰ وَأَهْلُ الْمَغْفِرَةِ

“And they will not remember unless Allah wishes. He is worthy of [your] being wary [of Him] and He is Worthy to forgive.” (74:56)

Wasi'al-Maghfirah

This means that Allah is expansive in His forgiveness. Nothing remains outside the boundaries of His forgiveness. Everything can be forgiven if a person sincerely asks for forgiveness. This has been mentioned once in the Qur'an in 53:32.

الَّذِينَ يَجْتَنِبُونَ كَبَائِرَ الْإِثْمِ وَالْفَوَاحِشَ إِلَّا اللَّمَمَ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ وَاسِعُ الْمَغْفِرَةِ ۚ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِكُمْ إِذْ أَنْشَأَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ وَإِذْ أَنْتُمْ أَجِنَّةٌ فِي بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ ۚ فَلَا تَزَكُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ ۚ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنِ اتَّقَىٰ

“Those who avoid major sins and indecencies, excepting [minor and occasional] lapses. Indeed your Lord is expansive in [His] forgiveness.” (53:32)

Khayr al-Ghafirzn

He is the best of those who forgive. This is mentioned once in the Qur'an in 7:155.

وَاخْتَارَ مُوسَىٰ قَوْمَهُ سَبْعِينَ رَجُلًا لِّمِيقَاتِنَا ۚ فَلَمَّا أَخَذَتْهُمُ الرَّجْفَةُ قَالَ رَبِّ لَوْ شِئْتَ أَهْلَكْتَهُمْ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَإِيَّايَ ۚ أَتُهْلِكُنَا بِمَا فَعَلَ السُّفَهَاءُ مِنَّا ۚ إِنَّ هِيَ إِلَّا فِتْنَتُكَ تُضِلُّ بِهَا مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتَهْدِي مَنْ تَشَاءُ ۚ أَنْتَ وَلِيُّنَا فَاغْفِرْ لَنَا وَارْحَمْنَا ۚ وَأَنْتَ

خَيْرُ الْغَافِرِينَ

And Musa chose out of his people seventy men for our appointment; so when the earthquake overtook them, he said: My Lord! If Thou hadst pleased, Thou hadst destroyed them before and myself (too); wilt Thou destroy us for what the fools among us have done? It is naught but Thy trial, Thou makest err with it whom Thou pleasest and guidest whom Thou pleasest: Thou art our Guardian, therefore forgive us and have mercy on us, and Thou art the best of the forgivers. (7: 155)

Karzm

He is generous or noble. This has been mentioned twice in the Qur'an in relation to Allah once as a quality of Allah Himself in 82:6 and another as a quality of divine Throne in 23: 116, where it can be translated as 'the Noble'.

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ مَا غَرَّكَ بِرَبِّكَ الْكَرِيمِ

O man! what has beguiled you from your Lord, the Gracious one. (82:6)

فَتَعَالَى اللَّهُ الْمَلِكُ الْحَقُّ ۚ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ رَبُّ الْعَرْشِ الْكَرِيمِ

So exalted be Allah, the True King; no god is there but He, the Lord of the honorable dominion. (23: 116)

Ghafir al-Dhanb

He is the Forgiver of sins. This has been used once in the Qur'an for Allah in 40:3.

غَافِرِ الذَّنْبِ وَقَابِلِ التَّوْبِ شَدِيدِ الْعِقَابِ ذِي الطَّوْلِ ۚ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۚ إِلَيْهِ الْمَصِيرُ

The Forgiver of the faults and the Acceptor of repentance, Severe to punish, Lord of bounty; there is no god but He; to Him is the eventual coming. (40:3)

Qabil al-Tawb

He is the Acceptor of repentance. This has been used once in the Qur'an for Allah in 40:3.

غَافِرِ الذَّنْبِ وَقَابِلِ التَّوْبِ شَدِيدِ الْعِقَابِ ذِي الطَّوْلِ ۚ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۚ إِلَيْهِ الْمَصِيرُ

The Forgiver of the faults and the Acceptor of repentance, Severe to punish, Lord of bounty; there is no god but He; to Him is the eventual coming. (40:3)

Dhi al-Tawl

He is Bountiful. This has been used once in the Qur'an for Allah in 40:3.

غَافِرِ الذَّنْبِ وَقَابِلِ التَّوْبِ شَدِيدِ الْعِقَابِ ذِي الطَّوْلِ ۝ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۝ إِلَيْهِ الْمَصِيرُ

The Forgiver of the faults and the Acceptor of repentance, Severe to punish, Lord of bounty; there is no god but He; to Him is the eventual coming. (40:3)

Dhu al-Jalal wa al-Ikram

He is the Possessor of majesty and generosity (or nobleness). This is mentioned twice in the Qur'an, once for Allah Himself and on another occasion for His face (wajh). About Allah Himself the Qur'an says,

تَبَارَكَ اسْمُ رَبِّكَ ذِي الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ

“Blessed is the name of your Lord, Possessor of majesty and generosity” (55:78).

Here a combination of two qualities is mentioned: generosity and majesty. The former is related to Allah's mercy and the latter is related to His greatness.

Tawwab

This refers to the one who often returns to Allah. When used for human beings it means those who often return to Allah to repent, but when used for Allah it means that He often returns to His servants. He first prepares them for repentance, and then accepts it if they do so. This is mentioned for Allah 11 times in the Qur'an, one of which states,

وَعَلَى الثَّلَاثَةِ الَّذِينَ خُلِفُوا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا ضَاقَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الْأَرْضُ بِمَا رَحُبَتْ وَضَاقَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ أَنْفُسُهُمْ وَظَنُّوا أَنَّهُ لَا مَلْجَأَ مِنَ اللَّهِ إِلَّا إِلَيْهِ ثُمَّ تَابَ عَلَيْهِمْ لِيَتُوبُوا ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

“... He returned toward them so that they might repent. Indeed Allah is Oft-returning, All-merciful.” (9: 118)

Dhu al-Fadl al-‘Azzm

Allah is the Possessor of great grace. This is mentioned in the Qur'an thirteen times. In one of these

verses, Allah says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن تَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ فُرْقَانًا وَيُكَفِّرْ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَظِيمِ

O you who have faith! If you are wary of Allah, He shall appoint a criterion for you (to judge between right and wrong), and absolve you of your misdeeds, and forgive you, for Allah is the Possessor of great grace. (8:29)

Ra'uf

Allah is Most kind. This is mentioned for Allah ten times in the Qur'an. For example, Allah says:

هُوَ الَّذِي يُنَزِّلُ عَلَى عَبْدِهِ آيَاتٍ بَيِّنَاتٍ لِيُخْرِجَكُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ ۚ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُمْ لَرَءُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ

It is He who sends down manifest signs to His servant that He may bring you out of darkness into light, and indeed Allah is Most kind and Most merciful to you. (57:9)

Ghafur

Allah is Oft-forgiving. This is mentioned 91 times in the Qur'an. For example, the Qur'an says:

وَإِذَا جَاءَكَ الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِآيَاتِنَا فَقُلْ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ ۖ كَتَبَ رَبُّكُمْ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ ۖ أَنَّهُ مَن عَمِلَ مِنْكُمْ سُوءًا بِجَهَالَةٍ ثُمَّ تَابَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَنَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

When those who have faith in our signs come to you, say, 'Peace to you! Your Lord has made mercy incumbent upon Himself; whoever of you commits an evil [deed] out of ignorance and then repents after that and reforms, then He is indeed Oft-forgiving, most merciful.' (6:54)

Dhu Maghfirah

Allah is the possessor of forgiveness. This is mentioned twice in the Qur'an in 13:6 and 41:43.

وَيَسْتَعْجِلُونَكَ بِالسَّيِّئَةِ قَبْلَ الْحَسَنَةِ وَقَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمُ الْمَثَلَاتُ ۚ وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَذُو مَغْفِرَةٍ لِلنَّاسِ عَلَى ظُلْمِهِمْ ۚ وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَشَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ

And they ask you to hasten on the evil before the good, and indeed there have been exemplary punishments before them; and most surely your Lord is the Lord of forgiveness to people, notwithstanding their injustice; and most surely your Lord is severe in requiting (evil). (13:6)

مَا يُقَالُ لَكَ إِلَّا مَا قَدْ قِيلَ لِلرُّسُلِ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَذُو مَغْفِرَةٍ وَذُو عِقَابٍ أَلِيمٍ

Naught is said to you but what was said indeed to the messengers before you; surely your Lord is the Lord of forgiveness and the Lord of painful retribution. (41:43)

Halzm

Allah is the All-forgiving who forgives the wrong-doers' actions. This is mentioned eleven times in the Qur'an one of which states:

تُسَبِّحُ لَهُ السَّمَاوَاتُ السَّبْعُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ ۚ وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّهُ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا

The seven heavens glorify Him, and the earth [too], and whoever is in them. There is not a thing but celebrates His praise, but you do not understand their glorification. Indeed He is All-forgiving, Oft-forgiving. (17:44)

Wahhab

Allah is the All-munificent; the One Who bestows many blessings. This is mentioned as a quality of Allah three times in the Qur'an. In one verse, Allah says,

رَبَّنَا لَا تُرِغْ قُلُوبَنَا بَعْدَ إِذْ هَدَيْتَنَا وَهَبْ لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً ۚ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْوَهَّابُ

“[They say,] ‘Our Lord! Do not make our hearts swerve after You have guided us, and bestow Your mercy on us. Indeed You are the All-munificent.’ (3:8)

‘Afuww

Allah is All-excusing, All-pardoning. This is mentioned five times as a quality of Allah. In one of these verses, Allah says,

إِنْ تُبْدُوا خَيْرًا أَوْ تُخْفُوهُ أَوْ تَعْفُوا عَنْ سُوءٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَفُورًا قَدِيرًا

“Whether you disclose a good [deed that you do] or hide it, or excuse an evil [deed], Allah is indeed All-excusing, All-powerful.” (4: 149)

There are several other qualities that relate to Allah's mercy such as Mujzb (Responsive – 11:61), Hamzd (All-praiseworthy – 17 times, such as in 35: 15), Khayr (Better – 3 times, such as 20:73), Barr

(All-benign – 52:28), Salam (Peace – 59:23), Quddus (All-holy – 59:23;62:1), Khayr al-warithzn (Best of inheritors – 21:89) and Khayr-un ‘uqba (Best giver of success – 18:44).[2](#)

Allah treats us with mercy and expects us to treat each other similarly

One can suggest that Allah has tried various ways to reassure us about His mercy. As He has mentioned His mercy numerous times, we are to be completely assured about it.

Allah’s emphasis on His mercy is also asking us to be merciful with each other. In fact, Allah is telling us that as your Lord I am showing abundant mercy without being in debt or needing anyone; you should also be merciful, especially because you are in need of each other and have rights upon one another.

Allah does not need any of us and He is still merciful. Our dependency on one another gives us more reason to be merciful to each other. If it were supposed to have one person who could say, “I do not and will not need anyone and therefore I do not need to bother what is happening to you” that would be Allah. He is the only one who can say, “I do not have any need and still I am the most merciful.” So what stops us needy people from being merciful? Later, we will reflect on verses 12 and 54 in chapter 6 where Allah says that He has made it compulsory on Himself to be merciful.

Allah’s mercy cannot be Blocked

If Allah wants to give His mercy to someone, no one can stop Him. If everyone gathered to do so, it cannot happen. He is the one with the power to ensure that His mercy reaches you. One is mistaken to worry about Allah as one who wants to give mercy but is unable to do so.

Allah’s mercy saves you from Punishment

One of the teachings of the Qur’an is that it is through His mercy that one can be saved from punishment in this world or the hereafter as depicted in the story of Prophet Noah, when his son refused to board his ship:

قَالَ سَآوِي إِلَىٰ جَبَلٍ يَعْصِمُنِي مِنَ الْمَاءِ ۖ قَالَ لَا عَاصِمَ الْيَوْمَ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ إِلَّا مَنْ رَحِمَ ۚ وَحَالَ بَيْنَهُمَا الْمَوْجُ فَكَانَ مِنَ الْمَغْرَقِينَ

He said, ‘I shall take refuge on a mountain; it will protect me from the flood.’ He said, ‘There is none today who can protect from Allah’s edict, except someone upon whom He has mercy.’ Then the waves came between them, and he was among those who were drowned. (11:43)

Prophet Noah’s son, instead of boarding the ship, took refuge with a mountain and expected to be saved

from the flood. Prophet Noah warned his son that none is able to protect him from Allah's punishment, i.e. being drowned, and that only those who receive His mercy are saved. For those who are saved, it is only because of Allah's mercy and if people do not make themselves available to His mercy they will not be saved. Allah is offering His mercy by asking us to board His ship of mercy. People should expect His protection although the son of Noah refused.

Another verse in the same chapter is about the Prophet Salih. When his people did not believe in him and slaughtered his camel Allah (swt) decided to punish them. However, the faithful were saved because of His mercy:

فَلَمَّا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا نَجَّيْنَا صَالِحًا وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ بِرَحْمَةٍ مِنَّا وَمِن خِزْيِ يَوْمِئِذٍ ۖ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ الْقَوِيُّ الْعَزِيزُ

So when our edict came, we delivered Salih and the faithful who were with him by a mercy from us, and from the [punishment and] disgrace of that day. Your Lord is indeed the All-strong, the All-mighty. (11:66)

Because of mercy from Him, Allah saved them. Thus, Salih and the believers were not saved except by His mercy. This is another function of the mercy of Allah.

Further descriptions of Allah's mercy

Merciful and Rich

In part II, we saw that Allah is both merciful and powerful. ³Allah is not like those who when weak they are kind and when strong they are not. Allah describes Himself as rich, absolutely free of any need; with these characteristics, He is still merciful:

وَرَبُّكَ الْغَنِيُّ ذُو الرَّحْمَةِ ۖ إِنَّ يَشَاءُ يُدْهِبْكُمْ وَيَسْتَخْلِفَ مِنْ بَعْدِكُمْ مَا يَشَاءُ كَمَا أَنْشَأَكُمْ مِنْ ذُرِّيَةِ قَوْمٍ آخَرِينَ

Your Lord is the rich dispenser of mercy. If He wishes, He will take you away, and make whomever He wishes succeed you, just as He produced you from the descendants of another people. (6: 133)

Our lord is all-sufficient and merciful; He is needless though He is still merciful. His mercy is not because weakness or His expectation of lending Him a helping hand in the future. He was not needy in the past to feel sympathetic towards us. Moreover, He is not like those who have mercy only when they are weak and for example, have no position, and forget you once they become rich.

Merciful and Knowledgeable

According to the Qur'an, Allah has both mercy and knowledge. Sometimes people are very kind to us because they do not know who we are, our wrong actions, the negative things we have said about them, or the lowly qualities you have. Had they known our true colours, they would have withdrawn their love and mercy from us. 'Abd al-'Azim Hasani reports that Imam Jawad (a) narrated through his fathers the following hadith from Imam Ali (a):

لو تكاشفتهم ما تدافنتهم

If you knew all the secrets about each other you would not have [even] buried each other.[4](#)

Out of His mercy, Allah has covered our defects us so much so that people do not know about the immoral qualities we have and the wrong actions we committed. Of course, the friends of Allah (swt) are exceptions, since they are much better than what people imagine; otherwise, most people have many problems upon which only Allah knows and still, Allah is merciful with them. People do not know and may or may not be merciful. Allah knows and He is certainly merciful.

There is a very beautiful verse about the prayer of the angels that confirms this characteristic of divine mercy. At the beginning of the creation of man, the angels were puzzled when Allah said He is going to appoint a vicegerent on the earth. They did not object. They simply questioned Allah to understand:

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً ۖ قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَنْ يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ ۖ قَالَ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

***When your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed I am going to set a viceroy on the earth,' they said, 'Will You set in it someone who will cause corruption in it, and shed blood, while we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your sanctity?' He said, 'Indeed I know what you do not know.'* (2:30)**

They said, are you going to appoint someone who is going to shed blood and do mischief? Of course, they did not refer to Prophet Adam as the one who would 'shed blood and do mischief.' That mischief was going to happen and continue in the progeny of Adam; they knew that some of his descendants would shed blood and do mischief, beginning with one of the sons of Adam. Finally, the angels were convinced that although there is such a problem, human beings do have some virtues, above all the capacity for knowledge that makes them worthy of being appointed as a vicegerent of Allah.

What would be your reaction if you were an angel? If angels were not pure, they would harbour feelings of hatred and hostility towards human beings because they would have thought of human beings as their rivals. They would have thought that they were too close to Allah, considering their constant worship and

glorification of Him.

Though this human being is now appointed as Allah's vicegerent on the earth, the angels did not develop any hatred. Indeed, what they do, as mentioned in the following verses and elsewhere is in addition to glorifying and praising Allah (or more precisely, as a part of their glorification of Allah, because tasbeih includes everything that angels and the inhabitants of heaven perform), they ask forgiveness for human beings. These constant prayers for us truly portray the beauty of their altruism. There is no sense of rivalry, hatred, or hostility. Regarding the prayer of the angels who carry the divine throne, the Qur'an says:

الَّذِينَ يَحْمِلُونَ الْعَرْشَ وَمَنْ حَوْلَهُ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَيُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ وَيَسْتَغْفِرُونَ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا رَبَّنَا وَسِعْتَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ رَحْمَةً وَعِلْمًا فَاغْفِرْ لِلَّذِينَ تَابُوا وَاتَّبَعُوا سَبِيلَكَ وَقِهِمْ عَذَابَ الْجَحِيمِ

Those who bear the throne, and those around it, celebrate the praise of their Lord and have faith in Him, and they plead for forgiveness for the faithful: 'Our Lord! You comprehend all things in mercy and knowledge. So forgive those who repent and follow your way and save them from the punishment of hell. (40:7)

رَبَّنَا وَأَدْخِلْهُمْ جَنَّاتِ عَدْنٍ الَّتِي وَعَدْتَهُمْ وَمَنْ صَلَحَ مِنْ آبَائِهِمْ وَأَزْوَاجِهِمْ وَذُرِّيَّاتِهِمْ ۚ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

Our Lord! Admit them into the Gardens of Eden, which you have promised them, along with whoever is righteous among their forebears, their spouses, and their descendants'. (40:8)

Therefore, believers have numerous angels who pray to Allah to forgive them. More importantly, because of their purity, their prayers are not rejected. Indeed, it is due to His mercy that Allah has created such benevolent angels and has taught them to ask forgiveness for us. So is it possible that Allah will not listen to them? Will He disappoint them? Certainly not. If we are true believers and sincerely return to Him and repent, He will not let them or us down.

Moreover, the angels in the above verses emphasize on two things: the All-embracing mercy and All-embracing knowledge of Allah.

Divine mercy is All-embracing

The angels' affirmation of Allah's mercy as all-embracing is seen in, other verses. For example, the Qur'an tells us about the prayer of Moses and Allah's answer:

أَنْتَ وَلِيُّنَا فَاغْفِرْ لَنَا وَارْحَمْنَا ۚ وَأَنْتَ خَيْرُ الْغَافِرِينَ

وَكَتُبْنَا لَنَا فِي هَذِهِ الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ إِنَّا هُدُّنَا إِلَيْكَ ۚ قَالَ عَذَابِي أُصِيبُ بِهِ مَنْ أَشَاءُ ۚ وَرَحْمَتِي وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ ۚ

...You are our master, so forgive us and have mercy on us, for you are the best of those who forgive. And appoint goodness for us in this world and the Hereafter, for indeed we have come back to you.’ Said He, ‘I visit my punishment on whomever I wish, but my mercy embraces all things...’ (7: 155 – 156)

“Whomever I wish” refers to those who have been insistently performing immoral actions that have left no room for forgiveness. Of course, this applies only to a specific type of people, but when it comes to Allah’s mercy it “embraces all things.” So to warn corrupt people, Allah speaks of punishment, while at the same time He reassures us of His all-embracing mercy.

There is a story, perhaps fictional, about a spiritual wayfarer who had a conversation with Allah. Teasing him, Allah told him, “Shall I inform people about your true character so that no one would respect you?” He replied, “Shall I inform people about your true character so that no one fears you and your warnings and therefore would not obey You?”

This inspirational story shows that if most people truly comprehended the immense mercy of Allah, there is a worry that they may, instead of appreciating His mercy, take advantage and become lazy and careless with respect to their duties. This is why Imam Ali (a) says:

الفقيه كل الفقيه من لم يقنط الناس من رحمة الله ولم يؤيسهم من روح الله ولم يؤمنهم من مكر الله

He is the wisest and the most knowing man who advises people not to lose hope and faith in the mercy of Allah and not to be too sure and over- confident of immunity from His wrath and punishment⁵.

A proper scholar of Islam is he who does not give too much hope to the people to the point where they end up feeling safe from the punishment of Allah, and does not frighten them so much that they lose hope. You have to strike a balance. One should be balanced in this world, though in the hereafter, the idea of people taking advantage of the mercy of Allah and carelessly performing corrupt actions does not exist.

There, all the realities will become clear and you will see the mercy of Allah with all the expansion that it has. The only people who are deprived from Allah’s overwhelming mercy are those who chose not to benefit from His mercy, just as the son of Noah (a) who refused his father’s invitation to board the ship and be saved by Allah’s mercy. Stressing on Allah’s all-embracing mercy, the Qur’an says:

فَإِنْ كَذَّبُوكَ فَقُلْ رَبُّكُمْ ذُو رَحْمَةٍ وَاسِعَةٍ وَلَا يُرَدُّ بَأْسُهُ عَنِ الْقَوْمِ الْمُجْرِمِينَ

But if they deny you, say, ‘Your Lord is dispenser of an all-embracing mercy, but His punishment will not be averted from the guilty lot.’ (6: 147)

If you were to send the most pious and honest person to deliver your message to a people who are deeply indebted to you, and instead of getting appreciation he is rejected and accused of being a liar, what would your response be? You may get angry and use harsh words or boycott them. However, the same does not refer to Allah, tells His Messenger that if the people deny you and accuse you of lying, tell them that your Lord has an encompassing mercy, for Allah wants them to return to Him. In other words, Allah is implying that though you have said this to my Prophet, there is still a chance for you to return, and He is eager to embrace you with His mercy.

Allah has made mercy incumbent upon Himself

Another aspect of Allah’s mercy stressed on in the Qur’an is that Allah has made it necessary and obligatory for Himself to show mercy. The Qur’an says:

﴿ قُلْ لِمَنْ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ﴾ ﴿ قُلْ لِلَّهِ ﴾ كَتَبَ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ ﴿ لِيَجْمَعَنَّكُمْ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ ﴾ الَّذِينَ خَسِرُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ فَهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

Say, ‘To whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth? Say, ‘To Allah. He has made mercy incumbent upon Himself. He will surely gather you on the Day of Resurrection, in which there is no doubt. Those who have ruined their souls will not have faith.’ (6: 12)

وَإِذَا جَاءَكَ الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِآيَاتِنَا فَقُلْ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ ﴿ كَتَبَ رَبُّكُمْ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ ﴾ ﴿ أَنَّهُ مَنْ عَمِلَ مِنْكُمْ سُوءًا بِجَهَالَةٍ ﴾ ثُمَّ تَابَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَأَصْلَحَ فَإِنَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

When those who have faith in our signs come to you, say, ‘Peace to you! Your Lord has made mercy incumbent upon Himself: whoever of you commits an evil [deed] out of ignorance and then repents after that and reforms, then He is indeed All-forgiving, All-merciful.’ (6:54)

Ka-ta-ba ‘ala comes from the root ‘kitabah’ which means ‘to write’ and ka-ta-ba ‘ala nafsih means ‘He has made it necessary and incumbent upon Himself.’ This is similar to the verse, “O those who believe! Fasting has been made incumbent on you (kutiba ‘alaykum).”

In chapter 6, verse 12, Allah tells the Prophet (s) to ask the people about the one to whom all that is in the skies and the earth belong. Then Allah asks him to give them this answer: “To Allah. He has made mercy incumbent upon Himself.” People should not have to worry as this world belongs to none but Allah. If this world had belonged to the people, we would have countless difficulties and problems; thankfully, this world belongs to Him, with Whom we are absolutely and unquestionably comfortable and

relaxed.

Then Allah says that out of His mercy, He will resurrect us and bring us together to give us eternal life. He will not let us perish by death. He will bring us back to give us more mercy. Of course, we should try to have good actions in our record of deeds in order to qualify ourselves to enter heaven and receive even more mercy. According to the Qur'an, there are people who have ruined their souls, or more precisely, 'lost themselves.' 'To lose one's self' is a very beautiful expression mentioned several times in the Qur'an.

These are the only people who do not and will not believe because they have chosen to be far from Allah and His mercy. This is their self-created problem. If I am a kind and generous person, in the freezing winter I will provide shelter, turn the heater on, make hot soup, and prepare a warm bed for you. Instead, you choose not to use my shelter. Allah sends 120,000 people to invite you, but you choose not to come. You say "I am fine outside". What would happen to you? And who should be blamed? If you want to deprive yourself from the mercy of Allah, why blame Him (swt)?

Thus Allah says that He has made it compulsory upon Himself to be merciful. It is only because of His mercy that He has stressed so much on His mercifulness in order to qualify ourselves to receive more and more of it; otherwise, He does not need us. Even if every person deviates, nothing is going to happen to Him. But He is so merciful that He says I have made it compulsory for myself to be merciful.

It is due to His endless mercy that He treats us like this because when you are free from need, there is usually a tendency to ignore others. Take, for instance, the way we treat ants. We feel we do not need them. Even a kind person would not know what to do with them (unless, of course, they are being researched for scientific purposes). Whether there are hundreds or thousands of them you would not take notice or care about them because you do not need them. If you are not merciful you may even kill them. How many of us are concerned about the ants that crawl about in our homes?

Maybe they have difficulties or a shortage of food. We still do not bother to care. But Allah, despite the fact He does not need us and that the distance between Him and us is considerably more than between us and ants, He still has unlimited devotion for us.

In chapter 6, verse 54, Allah says to His prophet, "When the people who have faith come to you, say salam (peace) to them." It means that the Prophet should be the first to say salam, and indeed no one could ever precede the Prophet in doing so. On one occasion, a man wanted to precede the prophet in saying 'salam'; so he went hid himself in a corner behind a wall and then jumped out to say salam to the Prophet.

However, when the Prophet (s) approached him he was shocked and could not speak. When the Prophet (s) initiated his salam, the man was relaxed. The Prophet was so kind and humble that he always liked to be the first to say salam.

In addition to asking His Messenger to say salam to the believers, Allah Himself will offer salam to the believers in heaven. The Qur'an says,

سَلَامٌ قَوْلًا مِنْ رَبِّ رَحِيمٍ

“Peace!’ A word (of salutation) from a Lord Most Merciful” (36:58).

In any case, Allah says when believers come to you, say salam to them (which may mean ‘send My salam to them’) and give them this message that “your Lord has made mercy incumbent upon Himself.” Why? Because “He is indeed all-forgiving, All-merciful.” Allah tells us that if any one of you has done something bad out of ignorance due to the pressures of the desires and temptations but regrets afterwards and becomes good, they should know that their Lord is forgiving and merciful.

Therefore, no one should think of himself as having done so many corrupt deeds that there is no chance for returning to Allah. By truly being regretful and changing ourselves for the better, Allah will certainly forgive us and has made it compulsory for Himself to do so. The message Allah asks His messenger to deliver to humankind is to be merciful. With respect to the acceptance of repentance in particular, we find a similar message in the following verse:

إِنَّمَا التَّوْبَةُ عَلَى اللَّهِ لِلَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ السُّوءَ بِجَهَالَةٍ ثُمَّ يَتُوبُونَ مِنْ قَرِيبٍ فَأُولَئِكَ يَتُوبُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ ۖ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا

[Acceptance of] repentance is incumbent on Allah only for those who commit evil out of ignorance, then repent promptly. It is such whose repentance Allah will accept, and Allah is All-knowing, All-wise. (4: 17)

What does it mean to ‘repent promptly’? The next verse clarifies this:

ۖ وَلَيْسَتِ التَّوْبَةُ لِلَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ السَّيِّئَاتِ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدَهُمُ الْمَوْتُ قَالَ إِنِّي تُبْتُ الْآنَ وَلَا الَّذِينَ يَمُوتُونَ وَهُمْ كُفَّارٌ ۚ أُولَئِكَ أَعْتَدْنَا لَهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا

But [acceptance of] repentance is not for those who continue committing misdeeds: when death approaches any of them, he says, ‘I repent now.’ Nor is it for those who die while they are faithless. For such we have prepared a painful punishment. (4: 18)

This means that before death approaches, it is still possible to repent; but when someone is in his deathbed, it is too late. The same goes for those who die without faith and want to become faithful after death. Hence, as long as you are living and are active and able to do something good, there is a chance for repentance, and Allah has made it obligatory on Himself to accept it.

Conclusion

Bearing in mind the many attributes of Allah's mercy in the Qur'an, Allah assures people of its reality with the expectation that we as human beings treat one another in the same way. Allah's mercy cannot be averted once He chooses to offer it and we are to believe it is none other but His mercy that will save us from divine punishment. His mercy and power coincide; He possesses absolute authority and offers His kindness, as opposed to those who are kind when weak yet inconsiderate when in control.

His mercy also overlaps with His knowledge, as He truly knows His servants, their good and bad deeds, and still continues to generously offer His forgiveness and compassion; whereas people tend to withdraw mercy had they been aware of each other's flaws. Moreover, He created selfless angels who constantly pray for us. Had we known of Allah's all-embracing mercy, we would run the risk of being negligent with regards to our duties, which is why it is important for us to simultaneously be aware of His punishment.

Taking everything into account, people should not think of themselves as having committed too many wrong deeds to be immune from His vast forgiveness. One is to be truly regretful while changing for the better and this will bring about salvation, as Allah has made mercy incumbent upon Himself. One is to strike the balance between hope and fear.

In part IV, we will study the arrangement Allah has made out of His mercy so that we can have a comfortable life on this planet. Many things are to be available to us so that we can survive and enjoy our life. Then we will study the divine plan for our guidance which is based on His mercy.

- [1.](#) Associate Professor at the Imam Khomeini Education & Research Institute, Qum.
- [2.](#) For more information about this category and other categories of divine qualities, please refer to "Image of Allah in the Qur'an" in Islamic Reference Series, vol. 1, Allah: Existence and Attributes, edited by M. A. Shomali.
- [3.](#) Shomali, M.A., "Understanding God's Mercy" in The Message of Thaqalayn, Vol. 12, no. 1, Issue 45.
- [4.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, p. 385.
- [5.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, Wise sayings 90

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